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# Commemoration, communion and courage, not celebration: Public prophetic theology 500 years after the Reformation[1]

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**Abstract**

Five hundred years after the Reformation, it is tempting to celebrate this influential and significant event. The Reformation, however, as an incident which also tore apart the Church, should be commemorated, but not celebrated. What can be commended, however, is the courage shown by those involved in the Reformation, especially as seen in the figure of Martin Luther. In this contribution, I will examine the courageous voices of the Reformers, who confronted the *status quo* of their day in order to also draw some guidelines for a similarly courageous and prophetic theology in the present day. The concept of community and Holy Communion will especially be stressed in this regard.

**Key words**

*Communion; ecumenicity; Eucharist; public theology; prophetic theology; Reformation*

## 1. Introduction

The year 2017 marks 500 years since the event commonly held as the beginning of the Reformation, symbolised in the anecdote of Martin Luther's nailing of the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg. Five hundred years after the Reformation, it is tempting to celebrate this influential and significant event, and this is in fact happening worldwide. The website http://lutheranreformation.org/ even has a countdown, counting

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down the days, hours, minutes and seconds to Reformation Day. In this contribution, however, I would like to put forward that the Reformation, as an incident which also tore apart the Church, should be commemorated, but not celebrated.

What can be commended, however, is the courage shown by those involved in the Reformation, as is also emphasised in David Wells' 2008 publication *The Courage to be Protestant*. In this article, I will examine the courageous voices of the Reformers, focusing especially on the person of Martin Luther for the purposes of this contribution. How the person of Luther has been utilised and also misused in the past can also serve as a note of caution when it comes how Reformation celebrations have been appropriated to serve other agendas. Luther confronted the *status quo* of his day and I will examine this in order to also draw some guidelines for a similarly courageous and prophetic theology in the present day. The concept of community and Holy Communion will especially be stressed in this regard.

## 2. Reformed courage

In *The Courage to be Protestant* (2008) David Wells states: "It takes no courage to sign up as a Protestant … To live by the truths of historic Protestantism, however, is an entirely different matter. That takes courage in today's context" (2008:1). These truths of historic Protestantism, and in particular the courage shown by the Reformation as a public, prophetic theology, is the primary interest of this contribution.

Protestantism is divided, but while "the older distinctions were doctrinal" (Wells 2008:2), it is not necessarily doctrine causing division between different groups and denominations. The existing divisions that exist among different groups, movements, and denominations of the Christian Church are also of specific importance for this discussion of a public, prophetic witness of the Church 500 years after the Reformation.

## 3. Martin Luther and the Reformation

For many, the beginning of the Reformation can be traced to Martin Luther nailing the 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg. This act, as well as Luther's subsequent behaviour, showed immense courage. Diarmaid

McCulloch indicates that Luther's courage might have been in part because he was backed up by the Elector Friedrich's support, which is puzzling in itself, as Friedrich did not know Luther and "never approved of his religious revolution" (2009:605). Without this support, however, McCulloch notes that it is most likely that Luther would have met a similar fate to Jan Hus, "burned by the authority of the church" (2009:605).

Soon after Luther's death, his speech stating that he could not recant was condensed into the two sentences he is perhaps most known for (even though he never uttered them), by the first editor of his collected works, Georg Rörer: "Here I stand; I can do no other" (McCulloch 2009:611–612). McCulloch proposes that this statement "can stand for the motto of all Protestants: ultimately, of all modern Western civilization" (2009:612). It is this courage that I am interested in exploring in this contribution, ultimately to draw some guiding principles as to what a similarly courageous response might look, or sound like in our present South African context.

It is important to remember, however, as Erik Herrmann reminds us, that while some see Luther as a romantic figure, casting him "as the father of the free individual who threw off the shackles of tradition and the church's institutional power" (2017:18), the rationalists of the Enlightenment, for example, mourned how much confusion and disorder was created by his 'superstitions' (2017:18). Justo González, for example, refers to some viewing Luther as an "ogre who destroyed the unity of the church, a renegade monk who spent his life shattering the very foundations of monasticism" (1985:14). Theodor Dieter also indicates: "For Protestant Christians, the word 'Reformation' has been associated with the rediscovery of the gospel, freedom, and assurance of faith, while even nowadays Roman Catholics spontaneously think of Reformation in connection with the split of the church, or more precisely of Western Christendom" (2017:4).

Werner Klän also notes that from a Roman-Catholic perspective, and '"even with greater ecumenical open-mindedness and "approaches to the person of Martin Luther", the "fact" of the "schism within the Western Church" remains, posing an ecumenical challenge' (2015:2). He mentions Wolfgang Thönissen, the Executive Director of the Johann Adam-Möhler Institute in Paderborn, who has designated '"this Protestant programme" as not being compatible "with the ecumenical programme"' (Klän 2015:2).

Klän further reminds us that the name 'Protestantism' "carries with it the risk of a hasty unification" (2015:3). In fact, even within Protestantism, Luther has been claimed by many, often with very different incentives and with many different motivations behind their assertions, also painting a much more nuanced view at times. It is to these different claims that have been made to the person of Luther that I now turn, to also indicate the danger in an uncritical and blanket celebration of the Reformation.

### 3.1 Historical claims to the person of Luther

Adolf von Harnack, speaking in Berlin on 31 October 1917, unequivocally linked Luther with "German national greatness and the country's wartime efforts" (Howard 2016:59). ""Practically all great men of Germany, whose accomplishments and progress have shaped our development … have happily acknowledged their debt to Luther and the Reformation … Among all genuine and great Germans, he [Luther] is the most genuine and greatest … Therefore, during this "horrible world war," Harnack concluded, "all Germans could look to him as an "example" (Vorbild) to imitate" (Howard 2016:59). Klän also cites Hennings, stating that 1917 celebrations of the Reformation "were marked by an emphasis on nationality and by championing an ethos orientated towards a "German Luther", imbued with heroism" (2015:5).

On the other side of the Atlantic, however, on the same day as Von Harnack was making these claims, William Walker Rockwell, speaking in New York, maintained that the "democratic notion of the 'priesthood of all believers" was "worked out in practice not so much in the State Churches of Germany, subject to the King of Prussia or to other territorial rulers, but here in the United States" (Howard 2016:59–60). In homages paid to Luther from Britain and American frameworks from 1917, "one observes a frequent distinction between the young Luther, a champion of freedom and conscience, and the mature Luther, a morally compromised mouthpiece of the power interests of German princes" (Howard 2016:59).

In the German occupations of 1938 and 1939 and the beginning of the Second World War, Martin Luther was also compared to Adolf Hitler in "an attempt by the Church to legitimise the National Socialist accession to power" (Klän 2015:6) and "to utilise the Reformer as the "crown witness for Hitler"" (Lehmann 2012, cited by Klän 2015:6). Much later, in 1983, "good

Marxist fashion East Germans tended to depict the entire Reformation as an "early bourgeois revolution"" (Howard 2016:61).

Thomas Howard also refers to this duality between the first commemoration of the Reformation in 1617, where "Wittenberg's theological faculty wrote the Elector of Saxony requesting that "the first Luther jubilee" (primus Jubilaeus Lutheranus) be "celebrated with festive and heartfelt worship"" (2016:51). In response, Pope Paul V responded by declaring the rest of 1617 to be a special year of Catholic jubilee, 'although the next official one was not scheduled until 1625' (Howard 2016:51).

It is because of these past triumphalist celebrations of the Reformation, ones "that have linked its legacy to nationalism, militarism, Wilsonianism, and Marxism-Leninism, etc.", that Howard solemnly asks us to also reflect on the darker sides of the Reformation in 2017 (2016:65).

That does not mean that there is no space for celebration. He readily admits that we also "have good reason to delight in the sixteenth-century recovery of a theology of the laity, the ordinary saints, in the teaching of the "priesthood of all believers"; in the searching catholicity of the Augsburg Confession; in the educational legacy of figures such as Philip Melanchthon; in Luther's dual emphasis on the free and serving nature of the devout life; and, not least, in Luther and other reformers' accent on call or calling" (Howard 2016:65).

Although ecumenically involved Protestants lament the split of the Western church, "the first feelings when they think of the Reformation are gratitude and joy" (Dieter 2017:4). Nonetheless, '[W[e can only celebrate if anything good happened to our community, but the split of the church is nothing good' " (Dieter 2017:4). The Reformation, 'of course, tore Western Christianity asunder' (Howard 2016:64).

Indeed, Howard asks, how then can we commemorate a historical event of such "immense influence and contested interpretation?" (2016:52). After all, it should be remembered, he continues, that "Protestantism … has not only been credited for restoring Christian truth or blamed for church divisions, but has been regarded as a cause of modern liberalism, capitalism, religious wars, tolerance, democracy, individualism, subjectivism, nationalism, pluralism, freedom of conscience, modern science, secularism, and so much else" (Howard 2016:52).

In this contribution, I am not aiming to resolve this tension between celebration and contrition, between commending and merely commemorating. I do plead that this tension be retained, however. Commemorating rather than celebrating the Reformation "would at least be an indication of the fact that the ongoing division within Western Christianity is no cause for jubilation" (Klän 2015:1).

So far, the figure of Martin Luther has been the focus of this contribution. However, while 'Reformation' can refer to the series of sixteenth century events that split Germany into Catholic and Protestant regions, Dieter indicates that it can also be used to refer to the sum of the theological discernments into the gospel of the Reformers, as well as the parishioners that came to accept these insights (2017:5). In this understanding of 'Reformation', "the Reformation does not belong solely to Protestants; the Reformers and their followers are by no means the sole subjects of this history" (Dieter 2017:5), which, in addition to Luther and theological associates, include many other role players, such as "the popes, bishops and cardinals, Luther's Saxon electoral princes, the Emperor, the French king, the Ottomans, and many others … Because this story involved so many actors, its outcome cannot be attributed unilaterally to Luther and the other Reformers" (Dieter 2017:5). Klän also notes that the Reformation was not only a general incident of Protestant Church history and German history, but rather 'a process of Christianity, therefore, elevating it to an event of world-historical significance (2015:2).

Dieter states:

> The commemoration of the Reformation as proposed in *From Conflict to Communion* recognizes this insight: 'What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed change. Remembrance makes the past present. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable. In view of 2017, the point is not to tell a different history, but to tell it differently' (§ 16). Commemorating the Reformation with both joy and lament, with thanksgiving and confession of guilt presupposes and expresses a way from conflict to communion that Lutherans and Roman Catholics have travelled over the past fifty years (Dieter 2017:6).

Part of Luther's discourse was aimed against those raised by Desiderius Erasmus, well-known humanist, considered by many to be the greatest scholar of the northern Renaissance. Even though Erasmus was a renowned scholar and Luther unknown, he felt compelled to respond, "since this was not merely an academic difference of opinion – an obscure point that could be debated in the ivory towers of the university" (Herrmann 2017:20). In short, as I mentioned at the beginning of this contribution, Luther had the courage to speak up for what he believed in, even though in doing so, he was challenging those of much higher regard and much more powerful than himself. It is this courage that I am interested in, in this contribution.

John Hull also indicates that one of the reasons for the rise of public theology can be found in the character of Christianity, which "since the sixteenth-century Reformation has taken a mainly individualistic and private form. Each individual person, the Protestant churches emphasize, is responsible for his or her own standing before God" (2016:84–85). It is therefore to public theology that I now turn, in particular in the South African context.

## 4. Prophetic theology as public theology

Friedrich de Wet notes that public life in South Africa has been restructured by the change from apartheid "to a non-racial liberal democracy" (2014:1). This quickly fluctuating scene and its implications, he states, "seem to have caught churches' leadership off guard regarding a new vision for the prophetic role in the renewal of society" (2014:1). In discussing prophetic theology as public, the first question that arises is, of course, why there should be any public declaration on public life from the side of the Church? Article 36 of the Belgic Confession states that the state is an institution of God: "God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. God wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order". "Since the state is an institution of God," Nico Vorster notes, "churches have a prophetic calling to remind the state of its divine calling" (2007:87).

According to Karl Barth, the prophetic vocation of the church is grounded in the realisation that "the state does not function in the realm of the law and the church in the realm of the gospel. The law is a form of gospel" (Vorster 2007:93). Barth makes use of the image of concentric circles,

with the Christ community forming the centre and the civil community the outer circle. These two circles share a centre, namely Jesus Christ and the proclaimed Kingdom of God (Barth 1946:21; see also Strauss 1993:18). They should "not be absorbed in each other, because each has his own mandate" (Vorster 2007:93), with the Christ community preaching the rule of Christ and praying for the state, and the civil or public community being "a mirror image of the Kingdom of God by respecting God's ordinances and subjecting itself to it" (Vorster 2007:93–94). The Church is thus an exemplary community, a visible sign of the actions of Christ and can therefore give Biblical guidelines to the State in the form of analogy (Barth 1962:724).

At the same time, it is important for Barth that a distance exists between Church and State. While the Christian can only act anonymously in the political arena, the prophetic task of the Church is especially emphasised through official ecclesiastical meetings (1946:37; Vorster & Van Wyk 2000:116). Towards the end of this contribution, this idea will be returned to.

Prophetic action, De Wet affirms, is "witnessing pertaining to the issues that need to be addressed in enhancing justice and order in this temporal life … prophetic vision for the future of society proceeds from the idea that only Christ can truly renew (transform) society when he returns, and it consists of groaning that longs for consummation whilst bearing witness to a lost and dying world" (2014:4).

Life, of course, cannot be separated into private and public. It therefore follows that prophetic theology, necessarily, should be public theology. Nico Koopman defines public theology and indicates that it "can be described as ecclesial, academic and social theology. As ecclesial theology, public theology reflects upon the practices of churches" (2009:119). Furthermore, he also states:

> Public theology reflects on the love of the triune God for the world. This love is expressed in the *magnalia Dei,* in other words, in the acts of creation, sustenance, care, election, and calling of God the Father, Mother or Parent; in the acts of reconciliation, salvation, and liberation of God the Son; and in the acts of renewal, fulfilment, and perfection of God the Spirit. This triune work establishes, confirms

> and actualizes the dignity and worth of all humans and of the rest of creation. God's love for the world, which comes to expression in the *magnalia Dei,* does have meaning, significance, and implications for all dimensions and terrains of life, from the most private, personal, and intimate to the most public, open, social, and cosmic. At its heart, therefore, Christian theology is public theology. It reflects on the love of the God who is at work in all spheres of life (Koopman 2010:123).

Similarly, this inclusive and profound participation also in public life is further seen in John de Gruchy's vision for the 'active role of the church in the transformation of the democratic South-African society' (De Wet 2014:4). De Gruchy states that the duty of the church in society is not to endorse the current situation, regardless of whether it is good or not, but rather "to seek its ongoing transformation, however difficult … to inject into a democratic system a vision that pushes democracy beyond its present achievements towards a greater expression of what we believe is God's will for the world" (2004:59).

Stanley Hauerwas, while disdaining the notion of a universal ethic or common morality that can be based upon natural law, appealed for Christian engagement in the world. Hauerwas, De Wet explains, "sees the role of the church as a community of faith to live out its existence and hence display to the world how the peaceful kingdom of God provides an alternative to politics built upon violence and falsehood" (2014:5). As prophetic theology, Koopman articulates, public theology endeavours to reflect on, express, define, lead, go along with and "be informed by the prophetic calling of churches in public life" (2009:120). He refers to James Gustafson's model of three discourses, namely the narrative, ethical and policy discourses, which Koopman defines as "constituent elements of prophetic speaking' (2009:121). While many people have a reductionist perception of what prophetic speaking entails, reducing it to merely a vision of the good life or a criticism against the current disposition, he argues: "More than utopia and criticism is required for credible prophetic speaking" (Koopman 2009:121). Based on these three elements of prophetic speech, Koopman then continues to identify five roles that prophets fulfil, namely that of visionaries (2009:121–122); critics (2009:122–123); storytellers (2009:123–125); technical analysts (2009:125–127); and as policymakers (2009:127–

129). It is especially the role of prophetic theology as criticism against the status quo that will be addressed in this contribution.

Christian communities' prophetic role, "their engagement to mend the world, to foster human flourishing and to serve the common good, is nothing but their identity in Christ projecting itself outward in word and deed" (De Wet 2014:7). In public theology and, I would argue, in prophetic theology, Word and deed are therefore both to be stressed equally.

Hull states that while many argue public theology to be safest articulated through persuasive speech, which is, of course, essential to generate "credibility for action", others emphasise 'the importance of action' (2016:86). In her study of public theology, Elaine Graham concludes that in the public arena, the only shape that Christianity can take is that of action. She argues that "an apologetic public theology is concerned less with words than actions, and that a defence of faith is to be found in its power to liberate and transform situations of injustice and human suffering" (2013:212). It is "actions, not words", which "constitute the chief credentials of the gospel in the public square" (Graham 2013:214).

The question I would like to put forward in this regard, is whether that is possible taken our present disunity and division into account? For both speech and action in the public square, a unified voice is not just important, but necessary. When it comes to public policy and opinion, distinctions between denominational or recently, even congregational views, further breaks down the perceived reliability and trustworthiness of Christian voices in the public realm. It is for this reason that ecumenism is of extreme importance.

While Ernst Conradie indicates that there is no one definition of what it means to be ecumenical (2013:18), he states that one form of ecumenism is tied together with catholicity (2013:19). He cites the World Council of Churches' 1997 document *Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches,* which defines catholicity as the "essential relatedness of churches and Christian communities locally, nationally, regionally and globally" (quoted in Conradie 2013:20).

Karl Rahner first spoke of the scandal of disunity. In *The Church and Sacraments,* as in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* of the Second Vatican Council, he defines the Church as follows: "By her relationship

with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity" (Rahner 1966:15). Rahner has also proposed that "agreement on the fundamental truths of the ancient creeds might constitute a sufficient basis for the unity and communion of the churches" (Fagan 1995:151). Joseph Fagan also remarks on the disappointment of ecumenical theologians over the "current slow pace" towards the restoration of unity and notes that this disappointment is shared by those who are committed to "overcoming the scandal of disunity" (1995:357).

In commemorating, remembering and reflecting on the Reformation, and especially also then the reception thereof in South Africa from the perspective of a public and prophetic theology, my imploration is therefore that we do so with an ecumenical set of mind and discernment. To conclude, I wish to now turn not to the conflict that exists, but to the possibility also for communion. Communion in the sense of relationship and spiritual union, of course, but especially how this can be fostered in the sacrament that celebrates this union with God and also with each other, the Holy Communion. In article 35 of the Belgic Confession, it is noted that by the "use of this holy sacrament we are moved to fervent love of God and our neighbours", and especially, that "we engage together". This holy sacrament, received "in the gathering of God's people", refers to all of God's people, also across the borders of denomination and the boundaries of Christian communities established in the aftermath of the Reformation.

Earlier in this contribution, Barth's stress on the prophetic witness of the Church, also in public, through official ecclesiastical meetings was noted. One such influential and ecumenical official meeting is the World Council of Churches (WCC). In turning to communion across denomination through the sacrament of Holy Communion, the Faith and Order Commission's 1982 document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) accepted in Lima, Peru, is of particular importance.

### 4.1 Baptism, Eucharist and ministry

Fagan reminds us that BEM is a "*converge* rather than an agreed statement since it represents a converging of different viewpoints that are not yet fully agreed upon" as well as that "since BEM is the work of *theologians* from

many churches … it does not represent *official* church positions" (1995:151, italics in original). In the Preface to BEM, it is also indicated that although the WCC is not "a universal authority controlling what Christians should believe and do", it represents "a rich diversity of cultural backgrounds and traditions, worship in dozens of languages and … every kind of political system" (1982). Nevertheless, all of the member churches are "committed to close collaboration in Christian witness and service" while also "striving together to realize the goal of visible Church unity" (1982). This is therefore an exceptionally valuable document in reflecting also on the public witness of the Church.

Part of the prophetic and public witness of the WCC, as also noted in the by-laws of the Faith and Order Commission, is "to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one *eucharistic fellowship,* expressed in worship and common life in Christ, in order that the world might believe" (1982, author's italics).

Regarding the Eucharist, BEM states that "the eucharist continues these meals of Jesus during his earthly life and after his resurrection, always as a sign of the Kingdom" (1982). Barth's emphasis that the concentric centres of both the Christian community and civil community share a centre, namely Jesus Christ and the proclaimed Kingdom of God, was mentioned earlier. As a sign of the Kingdom, the Eucharist therefore has a powerful message not only to those inside the Church, but as a public and prophetic witness as well.

BEM also puts forward that "the Eucharist is a sacramental meal which by visible signs communicates to us God's love in Jesus Christ, the love by which Jesus loved his own 'to the end' (John 13:1)" (1982). Public theology, as noted earlier by Koopman, considers the love of the triune God for the entire world. As such, the Eucharist is intrinsically part of the public confession of the Church.

"The Eucharist," BEM further indicates, "is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ. In the eucharistic meal, in the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, Christ grants communion with himself"

(1982). This communion with Christ is also of particular importance for our communion with others, as can be seen in the discussion on *The Eucharist as Anamnesis or Memorial of Christ:*

> Christ himself with all that he has accomplished for us and for all creation (in his incarnation, servant-hood, ministry, teaching, suffering, sacrifice, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit) is present in this *anamnesis,* granting us communion with himself. The Eucharist is also the foretaste of his *parousia* and of the final kingdom.
>
> The *anamnesis* in which Christ acts through the joyful celebration of his Church is thus both representation and anticipation. It is not only a calling to mind of what is past and of its significance. It is the Church's effective proclamation of God's mighty acts and promises (1982, italics in original).

In the Eucharist, we are therefore called to also visibly represent our spiritual unity, but also anticipate the eschatological final unity we expect and eagerly await. 'United to our Lord and in communion with *all* the saints and martyrs, we are renewed in the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ" (1982, author's italics). In the Holy Communion we are united with Christ, but also with each other across the boundaries of denomination and division brought on by the Reformation and its aftermath. It is therefore that BEM can claim: "The Eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church" (1982). "The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life" (1982). It also ends its discussion on the Eucharist with a very clear call for unity, expressing the hope that the "increased mutual understanding expressed in the present statement may allow some churches to attain a greater measure of Eucharistic communion among themselves and so bring closer the day when Christ's divided people will be visibly reunited around the Lord's Table" (1982).

BEM is a "major step on the long journey to the restoration of unity between the separated Christian churches" (Fagan 1995:152). Of particular value for

this contribution reflecting on public prophetic theology 500 years after the Reformation is its consideration about the Eucharist as a sign of unity and communion. To conclude this contribution, I offer a few last remarks in this regard.

## 5. Conclusion

"Public theology," Hull notes, "is at its most effective when it comes from the prophetic church" (2016:89). Unity is therefore of the utmost importance in matters regarding the public and prophetic voice of the church. In the document *Differing Attitudes toward Papal Primacy,* the passage on 'Lutheran perspectives' claim that "Lutherans increasingly recognise the need for a Ministry serving the unity of the church universal' (quoted in Fagan 1995:149). In looking at the figure of Martin Luther, whose thought and person have been used and misused in the past to underscore various ideologies, this modern Lutheran perspective is thus of extreme importance, especially as we commemorate the Reformation 500 years after the event.

"Eucharistic fellowship/the communion of believers' is an issue that has been polemic in South Africa ever since the 1830s when a Dutch Reformed congregation … requested the use of different cups for former slaves and former slave owners" (Conradie 2013:30).

Luther himself also "particularly opposed to the celebration of private masses" (González 1985:34). Private masses took the Eucharist out of the larger Christian community; Holy Communion celebrates exactly the communion that exists among Christians, and I would add, also across the boundary of denomination. Luther was critical of many elements, and stressed that the preached Word is of paramount importance, but also viewed the Word made visible in communion as the centre of Christian worship (González 1985:34).

In how the Holy Communion can also foster communion amongst Christians, one of the significant things to take stock of is the power play, often perceived differently from different perspectives, which exists between different congregations and between different denominations. In the Eucharistic community, power as 'power over' is overturned. Jürgen Moltmann indicates that it is precisely with the downtrodden, those who had been thrust out of society, that Jesus celebrated 'the messianic feast'

(1992:258). In her examination of Moltmann, Joy McDougall indicates that it is this 'open friendship', the "reciprocal dynamic of affection and respect, self-giving and self-distinction", that is, for Moltmann, the self-giving love of Jesus Christ made visible (2005:142–143). Within this paradigm of open friendship, both God's fellowship with humanity and the true fellowship of human beings with one another takes form (McDougall 2005:143). This community and fellowship is nowhere better represented and demonstrated than in the messianic feast of the Eucharist.

BEM reminds us:

> All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ. Through the Eucharist the all-renewing grace of God penetrates and re-stores human personality and dignity. The Eucharist involves the believer in the central event of the world's history. As participants in the Eucharist, therefore, we prove inconsistent if we are not actively participating in this ongoing restoration of the world's situation and the human condition (1982).

The Eucharistic meal also reminds believers that our very being and existence is dependent on God's grace. This is also profoundly evident in Rowan Williams' striking observation: "We do not work our salvation in offering the Eucharistic oblation; we witness to the share we have been given in the glorified life of Christ, manifest in the rest of our lives as charity, humility, and pity. And the purity of our offering depends upon our commitment to the Christ through whom it is offered" (1982:11). Norman Wirzba remarks that Christians "sacrifice truly when they cease to strategize to appease or bribe God. Their offerings become genuine when they are no longer made or of fear or anxiety, or with the hope of consolidating position and glory in the world. Instead, Christian sacrifice is about learning how to make one's life into a gift that creates communion" (2011:129).

González reminds us that Luther first wrote 97 theses at the University of Wittenberg, which he expected "would cause a stir, allowing him to divulge his great discovery' (1985:20). These theses, however, were "received with little more than a great yawn" (1985:20). When Luther later wrote his now famous 95 theses, González argues, he did so "with no expectation that they would have more impact than the previous ones" (González 1985:20).

Perhaps, I wish to suggest in this contribution, this can also be said to be the courage of the Reformation and what this courage can teach us in the present. To speak even when we do not expect to be heard. To be the prophetic voice of communion, the public voice against injustice, the voice of unity against divisions and the status quo, to live up to what McCulloch called the motto of all Protestants, to stand here, because we can do no other.

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